Minutes of the

Meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches

Video Conference, 15-17 February 2021

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I. First Plenary Session, 15 February 2021 – Opening Actions

A. Welcome and Opening Prayer

The moderator of the central committee, Dr Agnes Abuom (Anglican Church of Kenya), welcomed the participants to the extraordinary meeting of the WCC executive committee. She reminded the committee that in November 2020, the executive committee decided to hold this meeting with one clear agenda item: to find ways and means to convene the central committee so that the decisions are taken for the organization and for the fellowship. The report of the working group on constitution and rules, appointed by the central committee, provides guidance for executive committee in order to take decisions whilst discerning God's will as we pray, work and walk together. For this meeting there are no sub-committee agendas and no public issues statements to be approved.

She shared greetings from the former general secretary, Most Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, presiding bishop of the Church of Norway, to the executive committee, along with his prayers for a good meeting.

She expressed her appreciation for the executive committee members for their dedication and hard work since the pandemic started. She hoped that during this meeting and through the discussions, the committee would listen to God's will for the WCC and the fellowship, building consensus as we work for the glory of God.

Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) led the group in an opening prayer. She told the group about an initiative by the German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, called *#lichtfenster* (light window). It is a campaign to join together in commemoration for all those who died of COVID-19, both in Germany and in the world. Many die each day of COVID 19 and many are infected each day. The president puts a light in the window of his residence each evening so that the dead are not forgotten and to show that we mourn the loss together. Many others are also putting lights in their windows. This connects people with each other, the light gives warmth and shows compassion for one another in a dark time. She offered a prayer based on Psalm 67.

B. Opening Actions

The moderator opened the <u>hearing session</u> and confirmed that the threshold of participation of 2/3, according to WCC Rule XVIII.8, was met with 20 members of executive committee present for this meeting through electronic communications.

Dr Abuom presented the agenda for the committee's approval. H.E. Metropolitan Serafim Kykotis (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa) suggested that the executive committee issue abbreviated statements on

- The pandemic and social justice and for the poorer countries to have equal access to vaccination;
- The crisis situation in Myanmar; and
- An appeal to stop fighting in Africa.

H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Nifon of Targoviste (Romanian Orthodox Church), moderator of the public issues sub-committee felt that brief statements on these matters would not be sufficient to treat them fairly. If these were to be addressed by the committee then, sufficient time would need to be allocated. After some further discussion it was decided to retain the planned agenda on convening the central committee. The committee would take into account these important issues and find other ways of addressing them, e.g. through action of the leadership of the central committee or the general secretary. The acting general secretary suggested that other ways of taking up these issues could be brought to the closed session at the end of the meeting.

The agenda as presented was approved by consensus.

The minutes of the November 2020 meeting of the executive committee had been shared previously. Mrs Anne Glynn-Mackoul (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East) had suggested a couple of changes through the Governing Body Document Resource and Discussion Portal. The changes were approved by the committee. The November 2020 minutes of the meeting of the executive committee were approved by consensus with these changes.

The minutes of the closed session of the November 2020 meeting of the executive committee were approved by consensus.

II. Moderator's Remarks

For this meeting, with its limited agenda, the moderator shared a few opening remarks with the committee.

She thanked the governing body members and staff who have been working so hard. She is amazed at the amount of fruitful consultation that is taking place despite the isolation due to the pandemic. She hoped that next time the committee could hear from some of the staff on their experiences during the pandemic of closer consultation, actions of accompaniment, etc. with the member churches.

She also highlighted the issue of how to ensure justice in distribution of vaccine all over the world. She understood that the WCC team working on health and healing was discussing this with various constituencies.

She expressed her profound thanks to the WCC member churches. It is amazing how they have worked on keeping and enhancing the resiliency of the churches. Despite the pandemic, churches have found ways of addressing matters of security, mental health, food security, economic issues, domestic violence and other issues. It would be important to lift up the lessons learned by the churches and bring this into the conversation.

Dr Abuom thanked the leadership of the central committee for their contributions and collegial cooperation. She referred to the encouragement during one of their meetings of H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate) to keep a

positive attitude in this difficult time. Though separated we are still all together. She also thanked the acting general secretary and his leadership team. She pointed to a lesson from Gideon, who though from a small group, was still used by God.

She concluded by saying that the member churches are waiting for the decisions before the executive committee, to give them a way forward together.

III. General Secretary's Report

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, acting general secretary presented his report. The text is recorded here in full:

> ***Gratitude***
> I would like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to Dr Agnes Abuom, our moderator, for her address. Her devotion to the life of the council and our ethos of fellowship is inspiring.
>
> I also want to thank Bishop Mary Ann Swenson and His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios, our vice-moderators. The leadership of the central committee has accompanied me closely during this time of unprecedented change and I am grateful for their counsel and direction.
>
> I am also glad to welcome the members of the executive committee with gratitude for your commitment to the WCC and your participation this week. We may not be together face to face, but our togetherness in Christ remains strong.
>
> I want to say a special word of thanks to the members of the working group on constitution and rules for being here today and for all their efforts to help prepare this meeting.
>
> I also want to express my gratitude for the entire WCC staff and members of the staff leadership group. Every month I am amazed to see how their dedication and hard work engages the fellowship of member churches in living out their unity in Christ and expressing a common witness to the world.
>
> ***Accomplishments***
> In spite of the disruption in travel due to the pandemic, the WCC continues to fulfil its strategic role in convening churches to discuss important issues and find ways of responding together. This is our journey of faith, our pilgrimage of justice and peace.
>
> As members of the central committee, you received accountability report for December and January. I would like to acknowledge some recent accomplishments I think are important:

- In January, we published a reflection on the assembly theme – *"Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity"*. The reflection develops a Trinitarian understanding of the theme and responds to the challenges of our time. It is being well received and offers hope.

- Our commissions have gone online. The Faith and Order Commission met last month and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism meets in March. The pandemic has not stopped our commissions from discussing, discerning and deciding by consensus in new environments.

- Two weeks ago we observed the International Day of Human Fraternity with the Council of Muslim Elders and others to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue and affirm tolerance, mutual respect and religious diversity.

- I also met last week with the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations in the context of the pandemic. A healthy feature of this relationship is that we do not avoid discussion on difficult issues, such as Palestine and Israel.

- We remain strong in advocacy for climate justice. Last week we hosted an online French-speaking conference on "Rethinking Ecological Relationships in the Anthropocene Era", this week there is a webinar for "Common witness on environmental justice and religious pluralism" and the eco-school with young people in the Pacific begins.

- We also remain focussed on saying 'no' to sexual gender-based violence. Yesterday was Valentine's Day and for our Thursdays in Black ambassadors, it was an opportunity to raise awareness about the "shadow pandemic" of domestic abuse and violence we see with COVID-19-related lockdowns.

- You know how important Bossey is to me. Last month we celebrated the graduation of 29 students. One of the students said "Bossey provided an opportunity to serve God in a broader way". There is no better outcome than that. We hope to have new students in September 2021.

On the management front, I want to highlight a few accomplishments:

- You gave us the mandate to move forward in consolidating WCC Jerusalem-based activities. We have reinforced our efforts to work with all the stakeholders to achieve implementation by July.

- We started the year with new accounting software in place. The "ERP project", as we call it, equips WCC with the most up-to-date tools for managing the contributions of our churches and partners.

- The preliminary financial results for 2020 are encouraging. We received 15 million Swiss francs last year in contributions income. The net surplus for 2020 will be substantially more than revised budget of 9.3 million Swiss francs at about 12.5 million. Within that total, we will report about 14 million in proceeds from the land sales, and a drawdown of 1.5 million in other funds and reserves, after charging depreciation of 2.5 million. This represents a positive cash flow, in which the Bossey deficit is covered.

- As we finalize the accounts for 2020, it is possible we will see an increase in general reserves, because not all membership contributions were required to cover programme costs. In light of that, I propose for your consideration on Wednesday the following recommendation:

  *It is **recommended** the executive committee **decide** that, should general reserves exceed the target of CHF 7 million at 31 December 2020, any value above CHF 7 million be transferred to the assembly fund, reflecting an allocation of membership contributions in 2020 for the assembly.*

- The Green Village staff team has been working with Implenia on the preliminary offer of a neighbouring international organisation for the land plot and project "Durban". The steering committee will meet later this week to consider the offer, which has the potential to generate 30 million Swiss francs in proceeds towards the construction of the Lima building.

All these accomplishments bear witness to dedication and adaptation. Perhaps what has touched me the most are the stories of prayer. For the first time ever, the WCC went online live with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with over 1,200 participants, including many central committee members.

And each week, I personally receive many requests for prayer. This affirms the WCC is respected not just for our work on unity, justice and peace, but that we have a kind of "spiritual authority" and respect. As a priest, I am humbled by the faith of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Agenda

I want to say something about our agenda. This is an extraordinary meeting. We have one single agenda – how to convene the central committee in June. As requested by you, I convened the working group on constitution and rules to consider alternatives to an in-person meeting.

Based on our experience with the executive committee and commissions, I am convinced we can convene the central committee using electronic communications. The central committee has not met since June 2018. We need to come together again, not simply to do business, but to be a living expression of fellowship in Christ.

What I learned with the working group is that we should set a limited agenda to address critical business. Even the legal advice on using electronic communications

in governing body meetings emphasises the need for careful attention to process to assure valid decisions.

From my perspective, the critical decisions needed in June are to approve the assembly programme, to receive the assembly delegations, to nominate additional delegates and to approve the report of the central committee to the assembly. I also hope it will be possible to receive new applicant member churches and ecumenical partners already recommended by the executive committee.

Perhaps the hardest question before the executive committee is how to proceed with the process of election of a new general secretary if the central committee is not able to convene in-person before the assembly. The working group offers three scenarios. Even if we plan for an in-person meeting early next year, we need a plan "b" if that is not possible.

The working group report provides important observations and guidance. It does not include draft recommendations because the executive committee itself should formulate the way forward. We have two days of discussion in plenary and breakout groups to listen, share and develop a way forward, so that by the end of this meeting we are able to inform the members of the central committee what to expect in June.

Spirit

Last year the entire world was caught by surprise. A new virus infected millions of people and the loss of life is devastating. The virus stopped travel, closed churches and threatens our economies.

Last year we spent a lot of time reacting to change. We struggled, we adapted and we learned how to stay together, pray together and move together in spite of COVID-19.

We may not know how long this will last, but this year, we are ready to embrace change more proactively, to be bolder, more creative and more resilient in facing the challenges of our time with faith, hope and love. As St Paul reminds us, the greatest of these is love. For it is the love of Christ, as expressed in the unity of the Triune God, that moves the world to reconciliation and unity.

In 1946, seventy-five years ago this week, the first meeting of the provisional committee of the WCC met in the aftermath of World War II. During the meeting the provisional committee decided to establish Bossey and to convene the first assembly.

Like our fore-bearers, we face many challenges, but I am confident that together we will find the best way forward for the sake of the fellowship of member churches.

The moderator thanked Fr Sauca for his substantive and energizing report which she said lifted the spirit of the executive committee. The executive committee members also expressed their appreciation of the report.

H.E. Metropolitan Serafim Kykotis reminded the committee that Fr Sauca had been asked to take over as acting general secretary when the pandemic started. He thanked God for Fr Sauca and expressed appreciation that, in cooperation with the leadership of the central committee and staff, he has done well, including keeping the ecumenical institute open for students. This provides a sense of pride and satisfaction.

Dr Abuom said that the report reminded us that in this year we must embrace change and move forward together with positive actions. She referred to the group of people meeting in 1946 for the WCC in formation. They had a vision and acted on it. She prayed that this same spirit will be with us in the coming months towards the assembly.

IV. Report of the Working Group on Constitution and Rules

A. Introduction

Dr Abuom welcomed the members of the working group on constitution and rules who had joined this first session of the executive committee to present and discuss the report. She reminded the committee that in the meeting in November 2020, the executive committee had asked the working group to re-convene to offer some ideas on convening the central committee and its agenda. She noted that the members of the working group include:

- Mrs Anne Glynn-Mackoul (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East)
- Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang (Gereja Toraja)
- Dr Audeh B. Quawas (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem)
- Archbishop Emeritus Dr Joris Vercammen (Old-Catholic Church in the Netherlands)

The Most Rev. Dr Chibuzo Raphael Opoko (Methodist Church Nigeria) was invited but did not take part in the group.

Archbishop Joris Vercammen was asked to present the process of the working group and began by thanking the moderator for the opportunity to present the group's report to the executive committee. He said that in the years since the last meeting of the central committee, the working group on the constitution and rules met many times (virtually) reviewing and proposing revisions to the constitution and the rules of the WCC, including rules that govern WCC meetings. The group's report was prepared by February last year for presentation to the March 2020 scheduled meeting of the central committee. The recent invitation of the executive committee to prepare some ideas concerning alternatives to be reflected upon by the committee before making its final decision, was seen by the group as a token of trust in the working group and we thank you for it.

The work, to which the group was invited was:
"(…) to propose alternatives for a central committee meeting and how required decisions will be carried out including the process of the election of new general secretary, assembly preparations and general rules(…)"

The working group met four times and along with the working group members, Rev. Dr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca chaired the meetings. This commitment of time and highest level involvement and attention was very appreciated. Three members of the staff participated as well: Mr Douglas L. Chial, Director, Office of the General Secretariat; Ms Catherine Christ-Taha, Governing Bodies and Conference Office and Mr Georges Lemopoulos, Consensus Consultant. In one of the meetings the working group was honoured by the participation of the moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom.

The staff provided the group with excellent papers as background for the meetings. Their preparatory work enabled the group to pick up the task in an efficient way and made it possible to identify the issues on which to concentrate. A broader discussion was initially needed in order to unpack the wider and deeper issues that will challenge the WCC in each of the alternative courses of action. The minutes of each session provided continuity and enabled the group to address what would be appropriate to do in each circumstance. The last session was focused on the final reading of the report. He concluded by saying that he hoped the work would help the executive committee to make the best feasible decisions.

B. Presentation

Dr Audeh Quawas was invited to present the content of the report of the working group. He began by thanking the moderator and the members of the executive committee for asking the group to work on these issues. He thanked the acting general secretary for preparing and moderating the meetings, Mr Lemopoulos for his expertise and Mr Chial and Ms Christ-Taha for their assistance, facilitating the meetings and drafting. Dr Quawas then went through the report highlighting certain points.

He noted that the group had studied relevant articles in the WCC constitution and rules, had considered Swiss law and legal advice concerning governance in the context of the pandemic and had discussed all the matters within its mandate extensively.

Rule XVIII.8 provides a constitutional basis for convening central committee using electronic communications. In principle, there is no obstacle to calling for an online meeting of the central committee. Such a meeting should address limited and critical business. According to the rule, the threshold of participation will be 2/3 of 158 persons. Reaching a quorum may be very difficult and it is hoped that the central committee members will commit themselves to participating. The importance of maintaining the ethos and practice of consensus was also highlighted. It can be difficult for the moderator and co-host to lead a meeting of 30 people, like the executive committee. This will clearly be a challenge for the central committee meeting which will include many more participants.

The group also discussed the participation of ecumenical partners – NCCs, REOs, CWCs, SMs, IEOs – in the central committee meeting. The group did not make a specific recommendation on their participation, but Dr Quawas noted that it may not be wise to close the doors on their participation now with the pandemic. He added that those ecumenical partners in an official relationship with the WCC have the right to speak but not take part in decision making during a central committee meeting. Inviting them will, of course, increase the number of participants in the meeting.

Different forms of electronic communications, e.g. video-conference, portal for presenting and discussing, etc. can be used in order to prepare the participants for the meeting. The regular standing committees may consider reports and make recommendations. For such a meeting by electronic communications it will be necessary to limit the agenda to only those issues which are critical for the organization and the fellowship. The group had noted several items:

General Business

- The executive committee's accountability report to the central committee; normally such a report is presented to the central committee at the beginning of the meeting and the central committee is asked to receive it.
- Modification of the strategic plan and financial strategy; if there is anything that needs adjusting because of the assembly postponement and in response to the pandemic, the central committee will have to make a decision.
- Membership matters; these are always presented to the central committee and there are completed files ready for decision; no new files would be tabled.
- Delegation to the executive committee of matters arising before the assembly; this would have been requested even at an in-person meeting of the central committee in order to ensure that the business of the organization is continued to the assembly; this decision would empower the executive to carry on even if the central committee cannot meet.

Assembly

- The assembly planning committee (APC) report will need to be presented to the central committee for decision, including approval of the assembly programme.
- Delegations and additional delegates; most churches have sent in their delegations, but there is still the 20% additional delegates which are to be named by the central committee to ensure a fair and adequate representation among the delegates.
- The central committee report to assembly, "From Busan to Karlsruhe" will be presented for approval by the members of the central committee.

With regard to discussions on the constitution and rules the first report of the working group, mandated by the central committee at its meeting in 2018, was already submitted, and is ready for presentation to the central committee. Many amendments are proposed in that report and this adds to the complexity of presenting it to the central committee for decision. He noted that addressing this report would not be feasible for a central committee by electronic means. This could affect the discussions and way of approving the proposals very negatively. For such a discussion it is necessary to give everyone the opportunity to speak and propose alternatives. These kinds of discussions are best undertaken at in-person meetings. There are some suggestions from the report, however, which could be implemented without formal codification, e.g. the election of the programme and finance policy committee moderators could take place during the organizing meeting of the central committee; the way commissions, reference and advisory groups are established; or the protocol with suspended churches. The amendments proposed to rules I and VI, require assembly approval, and these would have to be addressed later, for eventual presentation to the 12th assembly.

Dr Quawas told the executive that the working group had spent much of its meeting time reflecting and conferring on the process for the election of a new general secretary. He reminded the committee that the current process is not a simple election but rather includes presentation of the search committee report, approval or not of the report, hearing from the candidates, election if the report is approved, naming a new search committee if it is not – all to be carried out in a closed session. For this process the group had discussed three possible scenarios:

- Scenario a – during a meeting of the central committee by electronic communications in June 2021

This was not recommended for many reasons. Given the complicated nature of the process mentioned above, it would be difficult to carry out the process of election by video conference. If the election will not take place in June 2021 it would be important to clarify the term of the acting general secretary and to inform the candidates of the status of the process. As custodian of the search process, the moderator of the central committee would have to be in touch with the candidates.

- Scenario b – during an in-person meeting of the central committee in early 2022

The group felt that this was the best possible scenario. Other items pending decision by the central committee can also be put on the agenda of this meeting. While attention must be paid to financial and human resources for this meeting, given that it would be taking place in the same year as the assembly, these should not be the only considerations that the executive committee reviews.

- Scenario c – during an in-person meeting of the central committee, after the 11th assembly

This scenario is only an option if no in-person meeting can take place before the assembly. In this case the newly elected central committee would have to conclude the process begun by the current central committee. Following the organizing meeting of the central committee, to take place the day after the assembly in Karlsruhe, an ordinary meeting of the central committee could be called for one more day to carry out the process of election.

Dr Quawas thanked the working group, especially mentioning Mrs Anne Glynn-Mackoul who had moderated the group and taken responsibility for much of the drafting of the report which was to be presented to the central committee in 2020. He also thanked Ms Catherine Christ-Taha for her support and facilitation of the group's work.

Dr Quawas concluded saying that the report on convening the central committee meeting in June 2021 submitted now to the executive committee and the power point presentation had been approved by consensus by the working group.

Dr Abuom thanked the members of the working group for their presentations and called for a break after which some time for questions and discussion would take place on the report.

C. Discussion

When the committee came back to its business the moderator added her thanks to the consensus consultant for his expert support of the group and for the presence and leadership of the acting general secretary. She opened the hearing session for further discussion on the report.

H.E. Metropolitan Seraphim expressed his thanks to the group for their helpful report. With regard to the process for election of a new general secretary, he felt it was unnecessary to discuss the first scenario as it will not be possible. He supported scenario b and hoped that the election could take place long before the assembly so as not to take the focus away from the global gathering in Karlsruhe.

H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios also thanked the group. He felt the report was well done and showed how much work went into it. He spoke against scenario c on the basis of principles of accountability. The search committee was elected and mandated by the current central committee which concludes its own mandate right before the assembly. If an election cannot take place before the assembly the new central committee would have to carry out the process. However the current central committee must receive the report of the search committee in some way or another before the assembly in order to conclude its own work. He felt that this was a very delicate issue but that concluding the process was not a task for the next central committee.

Dr Quawas responded by saying that scenario a is not recommended, but the group had to mention it as a possibility. He added that this is the first decision for the executive committee to make, that such an election process will not be included in the agenda of an online meeting. Scenario b is the best case, that the current central committee has a final in-person meeting in order to take its responsibilities, including bringing to conclusion the election process. With regard to scenario c and the accountability of the current central committee to undertake the work mandated during its term, this option is only presented in the case that holding an in-person meeting before the assembly proves to be impossible. In such a case it is important that there is an institutional continuation of business, even if the term of the current central committee has concluded. The search committee process was not an easy one and its report cannot simply be dropped. But even if the current central committee is unable to address it, a central committee must give it a hearing. There is an additional dilemma to scenario c, that is, it is likely that members of the search committee are not among the newly elected members of the central committee. In this case another way will have to be found. He reaffirmed that the best option is scenario b.

Mrs Glynn-Mackoul agreed that the most difficult scenario is if the central committee cannot meet in-person. This is one of the reasons to consult with candidates and understand if they are still interested in retaining their candidacy for the position.

H.E. Metropolitan Nifon said that the working group had produced a very good report. He confirmed that for the process of election of the general secretary he did not see other possible scenarios than the three presented. He felt that the scenario c was almost impossible to accept but must be retained as the worst case scenario. He confirmed that

scenario b is the best option and that it would be very strange to postpone the process till after the assembly with a new central committee. He said that the decision would have to wait till June to see how the pandemic develops and whether the central committee would be able to meet in-person in 2022. The executive committee will have to formulate the recommendation very carefully for decision by the central committee in June.

H.E. Archbishop Dr Vicken Aykazian (Armenian Apostolic Church [Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin]) added his thanks to the working group for their report and the wise advice contained in it. He echoed H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios' concerns about postponing the election till after the assembly. This would create many difficulties. It is not even sure that the two current candidates would want to continue. Starting from zero will also be very difficult. He proposed that the central committee try and meet in-person in June 2021 including those who have been vaccinated and anyone else who could participate. He felt that it is important to get this done and not to simply wait.

H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios continued the discussion by saying that not only is scenario b the best option, but it is also the most realistic. Even if it is financially difficult for the council, we have to try and have an in-person meeting. If it cannot take place in January 2022, then it should be planned for later in that year. He asked if an in-person central committee meeting is not possible, then who decides on the scenario, and who gives the green light for a way forward. There is also the need for some moral discernment. WCC cannot say to the candidates that they are no longer needed and that a new process will begin. It is important to go slowly and surely. Unfortunately every scenario is related to the evolution of the pandemic.

H.E. Metropolitan Nifon added that it is important to take into account the interest of the churches even more than the candidates themselves. It is critical to be realistic about the interests of the WCC. We do not discount the candidates but have to be clear on what is best for the organization.

Dr Quawas reminded the committee that while no one is excluding the two candidates, the process of election of the general secretary does not guarantee that one of the two would be elected. In the first place it depends on the action of the central committee to accept or reject the report of the search committee. He again confirmed that scenario b would be best. However, if it is impossible, then there must be an alternative. In this case the report of the outgoing central committee can mention the issues still pending to the assembly so that the newly elected central committee can take over. It is in the interest of the organization to take decisions slowly and carefully in consultation with member churches. He added that even if the executive committee decides to hold a central committee meeting in June by electronic means, if there is no quorum, then there is a new challenge. There may be third waves of COVID in various countries and new strains are appearing. It is important for the fellowship to remain strong and the executive committee is certainly up to the task to decide what is best for the organization.

The moderator reminded the committee that these issues would be discussed in more depth in the breakout groups the following day.

Mrs Glynn-Mackoul mentioned that it should be kept in mind that while other assemblies may have been able to do an election by electronic means, WCC rules exclude this totally. She said that if scenario c were the only option, this would not mean that the two candidates would be off the table. A new search process could allow them to re-apply. In managing the process, the executive committee has to also keep in mind that there may be legal repercussions in not proceeding with the search committee report. Managing the risk of not holding an election is also something that concerns the executive committee.

Bishop Simo Peura (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland) added his thanks for the report and the discussion. He said that if we assume that we can have assembly with more than 1,000 participants, then it will be possible to have an in-person meeting of the central committee which is only 158 members.

The report of the working group was received by consensus with appreciation by the executive committee.

At the request of the moderator, Mr Chial explained that on the following day the committee would initially meet in plenary. After the common prayer the committee would go into breakout groups, in sub-committee configurations for further discussion. He pointed the members to the Doc. No. 04.1 Resource for Breakout Group Discussions which can be used to facilitate the discussions.

Mr Lemopoulos tested the emerging consensus with the committee. He felt that some consensus had been developing on these ideas:

- There are some urgent public issues to be discussed in the closed session for decision on the way forward;
- For the process of election of a new general secretary there is a preference for scenario b as the best, most realistic option for the institution to move ahead; some modalities of this scenarios are still to be discussed;
- A meeting of the central committee has to take place by electronic communications this June.

He said that there was not much discussion on the proposals for the limited agenda of the central committee meeting to take place in June. He had not heard any objections to discussing amendments on the constitution and rules later rather than in June.

Ms Emily Jane Evans (Uniting Church in Australia) asked that any confirmation of emerging consensus be done through the showing of indicator cards. She said that there was a lot to discuss the following day including how realistic it is to hold an in-person meeting early in 2022.

V. First Plenary Session – Closing Remarks and Prayer

Dr Abuom concluded the day's session emphasising that the purpose of breakout groups is to analyse and discuss the report and suggestions of the working group. The discussions are

not yet concluded. She reminded the committee to be conscious of the context in which we are operating. She said that the spirit around this discussion has been very good, very understanding, and that the executive seems to be really seeking to explore positive ways forward for the sake of the council and for the fellowship. She felt confident that if we keep this spirit the Lord will give us a way forward more clearly as we seek God's will.

Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber led the group in prayer based on John 1:5, including the Lord's Prayer.

VI. Second Plenary Session, 16 February – Opening Remarks and Prayer

The executive committee met for its second session with the vice-moderator of the central committee, Bishop Mary Ann Swenson (United Methodist Church), moderating a hearing session. The threshold of participation of 2/3 was reached with 18 members of executive committee present.

Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus, interim deputy general secretary, led the group in prayer. He said that in the context of the WCC in formation and the ecumenical prayer service in St Pierre Cathedral held in February 1946, mentioned the day before, three sermons were delivered. Rev. Martin Niemöller told the story of when, upon being arrested and imprisoned by Gestapo, his father had said "Be of good cheer, my son. Remember that there will be Christians praying for you from Greenland to the Pacific Islands." In the following eight years this kept him sane and joyful, even in solitary confinement, knowing he was part of a wider Christian family. Even now in a very difficult time, there is a resilience in work of WCC and we can continue to bring hope to the world and live in reconciliation and unity. The prayers were based on Psalm 133 and Ephesians 2.14-16.

VII. Discussion on Working Group Report in Breakout Groups

Bishop Swenson briefly reviewed what had been discussed the previous day. She told the committee that it would now go into breakout groups and discuss the working group report further. Following an hour in small groups the committee would return to plenary and report back.

After the breakout groups and a short break, the executive committee came back into a hearing session, moderated by Bishop Swenson. The rapporteur of each group presented the discussions. Some of the highlights are presented here:

- Participation of central committee members – obtaining a quorum may be difficult, especially given that the central committee members are from so many different time zones; it may be difficult to secure participation from all regions; there should be strong encouragement to name substitutes for those who cannot participate
- Implementation of rules of process, including interventions from the floor and points of order; advice of consensus advisor will be needed

- Preparation of participants – communication, including personal outreach, well in advance of the meeting, to involve and inform members; regional meetings; new technology is needed for a better portal
- Agenda of the meeting by electronic communications should include
  - General business including executive committee accountability report to the central committee; modification of the strategic plan and financial strategy; membership matters; delegation of matters related to and arising before assembly to the executive committee, e.g. final approval of CC report to the assembly; additional assembly delegation confirmations; consideration might be given to some revisions of the rules, particularly those critical to the formation of a new central committee or those related to electronic meetings, or decisions by electronic means
  - Assembly preparations including the report of the assembly planning committee (APC) and deciding Assembly programme as proposed by the APC; assembly delegations and additional delegate nominations; central committee report to assembly (From Busan to Karlsruhe)
  - Other matters including updates on finances with assembly finances; Green Village
  - Setting the next central committee meeting
- Elements to include in the central committee meeting from lessons learned, from executive committee meetings and from those churches who have held such large meetings, include
  - Necessity of times of prayer
  - The clearer the guidance to the committee, the better the discussion; providing an overview on matters for decision is helpful
  - Using breakout groups, in the form of the standing committees, could facilitate work in reaching consensus; cluster groups (e.g. youth, EDAN, regional) for additional discussions may be useful to encourage greater participation
  - Opportunity for informal conversations during break times
  - Staff need to have a view on all participants (using indicator cards and raise hand function) to assist the moderators in reading the room
- Programme format – should be adapted according to the form of the meeting; the central committee could be extended over an additional period of time, with webinars offered presenting content on the emerging issues ahead of the meeting, with possibility for discussion; length of sessions and number of days to be decided (note: fewer days may encourage more participation but also reduce the possibility for all to contribute)
- Ecumenical partners, normally invited to central committee, should be included; but there should be a way to distinguish advisors from members
- A good ethos is needed to sustain participation, inclusivity and momentum, e.g. through prayer and worship
- Process of election of a new general secretary – preferred format is an in-person meeting in 2022 before the assembly; if this is not possible the central committee will have to decide how process should be carried out; depending on pandemic conditions, it may be appropriate to adapt matters of process and to share information concerning the impact of the Swiss ordinance on decision-making during the pandemic; proposals can be brought to the central committee for decision.

VIII. Second Plenary Session – Closing Remarks and Prayer

Following the discussion it was decided that staff would work on a draft report and send it to the executive committee at least two hours before the session on the following day.

Bishop Swenson thanked the committee members for the good meeting today and their active participation.

Dr Mateus Pedroso led the closing prayer and continued with the story of the ecumenical prayer service in 1946.

The second preacher was Rev. Chester Miao, a Chinese who had been imprisoned in Japanese-occupied Shanghai throughout the Sino-Japanese war. He told of how his Japanese jailer had also been a Christian and, they would kneel in prayer together in his cell.

The third speaker was Bishop Eivind Berggrav, of the Church of Norway, who because of his role in leading the church resistance had been kept under house-arrest during the war. He told of how the man who brought the rations whispered through the window: "My old woman and I were listening to the BBC last night and we heard the Archbishop of Canterbury pray for you by name."

The closing prayer was based on the Magnificat.

IX. Decision Session, 17 February – Opening Remarks and Prayer

The vice-moderator of the central committee, H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios, welcomed the committee to a decision session. He hoped the last session would conclude with the good spirit of fellowship experienced in the previous two sessions. The threshold of participation of 2/3 was reached with 19 members of executive committee present.

Rev. Everdith Landrau led the group in an opening prayer.

X. Matters for Decision

H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios thanked those who worked to provide the Report of the Executive Committee (Doc. No. 05). He thanked the working group for their report and the acting general secretary for his input.

Mr Lemopoulos highlighted the second recommendation in the report which said that the report of the working group as well as the notes from the breakout groups would be used as resources for planning the central committee meeting by electronic communications. A clarification was made by H.E. Metropolitan Nifon, that in case the notes from the groups

were not in line with the recommendations, it would be the recommendations that take precedence. This was agreed by consensus.

Mrs Glynn-Mackoul said that as the executive committee decides on the recommendations in the report, it will be important for the committee not to tie its own hands. As an executive committee it is critical to focus on fact that the executive has broad responsibilities and authority and that these may need to be used if the central committee cannot meet in person in 2022.

Bishop Swenson led the executive committee through the decision session.

A. Report of the Working Group

The working group report served as the basis for the careful consideration of the executive committee agenda.

Recommendation 1

*The executive committee **receives** the report of constitution and rules appointed by the central committee, with appreciation for their work.*

Agreed by consensus [on Monday]

Recommendation 2

*The executive committee **asks** the acting general secretary to ensure that the report of the working group and the notes from the breakout group discussions be used as resources for preparing to convene the central committee in June 2021, using electronic communications.*

Agreed by consensus

B. Convening the Central Committee

The central committee has not met since June 2018. The ongoing restrictions due the COVID-19 pandemic make it impossible for the central committee to meet in-person 23-29 June in Geneva as planned. The central committee needs to meet, not only to take decisions on urgent matters that are reserved to the central committee, but to share the experience of the churches in responding to unprecedented change and the devastating loss of life.

Recommendation 3

*The executive committee **agrees** to convene the central committee 23-29 June 2021, using electronic communications as provided in Rule XVIII.8, to address* urgent matters that are reserved to the central committee*, but also to be an expression of the living fellowship of churches.*

Agreed by consensus

Recommendation 4

*The executive committee **directs** the acting general secretary to prepare the meeting of the central committee in June 2021, using electronic communications, to address the following agenda items*

:

A. *General business*
   1. *Executive committee accountability report to the central committee*
   2. *Modification of the strategic plan and financial strategy*
   3. *Membership matters – action on completed files*
   4. *Delegation of matters related to and arising before assembly to the executive committee, e.g. final approval of central committee report to the assembly, additional assembly delegation confirmations*

B. *Assembly*
   1. *Receive and act upon the report of the assembly planning committee (APC)*
   2. *Assembly delegations and additional delegate nominations, as processed through the governance and nominations committee of the CC*
   3. *Central committee report to assembly*

C. *Status of the process of the election of the general secretary*

D. *Sharing and Updates*
   1. *Sharing from the fellowship of member churches*
   2. *Financial overview, including assembly finances*
   3. *Green Village update*

E. *Other items*
   4. *Additional matters that may be considered by the executive committee when finalizing the preparation for the central committee meeting in June*
   5. *Plans and dates for the next in-person meeting of the central committee*

Agreed by consensus

Recommendation 5
*The executive committee **asks** the acting general secretary to adopt a pro-active approach in communicating with the members of the central committee and to monitor this participation making sure that a daily quorum is achieved.*
Agreed by consensus

Recommendation 6
*The executive committee **agrees** that ecumenical partners (REOs, CWCs, NCCs, SMs, IEOs) be invited to send advisors to the central committee.*
Agreed by consensus

The executive committee offered further advice to the working group report on how best to prepare the meeting so as to maintain the ethos and practice of consensus decision-making. As recommended above, this will be used as a resource for planning.

Recommendation 7
*The executive committee **agrees** to maintain the ethos and practice of consensus decision-making when convening the central committee using electronic communications.*
Agreed by consensus

C. Process of the election of a new general secretary

According to the WCC rules and supplement outlining the process of the election of the general secretary, the central committee had established that the election must take place at an in-person meeting of the central committee in a closed session, following the procedures, including presentation of the report of the search committee. Though an in-person meeting is not possible in June 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions, it is hoped that an in-person meeting of the central committee will take place before the assembly in early 2022.

Recommendation 8

*The executive committee **agrees** that the current process for election of a new general secretary requires an in-person meeting; and **affirms** the importance of holding an in-person meeting of the central committee in early 2022, if possible, to continue the process of election of a new general secretary.*

Agreed by consensus

Ms Glynn-Mackoul reminded the committee that, during the pandemic, the Swiss government had enacted several ordinances which facilitate organizations in making decisions in order to continue their business while in-person meetings are restricted. Though in the WCC rules the election does not take place other than during an in-person meeting, the Swiss ordinance allows the central committee to decide to process the election differently than is described in the supplement.

H.E. Metropolitan Nifon spoke strongly against changing the rules. H.E. Seraphim agreed and said, though the executive committee is not above the rules, the committee can make proposals to the central committee. It is the central committee which must finally decide. Dr Abuom added that the executive committee must not be seen to be usurping the power of the central committee. H.E. Archbishop Vicken also cautioned that the executive committee should not take decisions beyond its own responsibilities until given a specific mandate by the central committee.

Recommendation 9

*The executive committee **asks** the central committee in June 2021 to delegate responsibility to the executive committee to make the final decision about the central committee meeting in 2022, whether it will be in-person or by electronic communications, depending on the situation of the pandemic.*

Agreed by consensus

Recommendation 10

*The executive committee **asks** the moderator of the central committee, as the custodian of the process of the election of the general secretary, to inform the candidates nominated by the search committee about the process, immediately following the meeting of the executive committee.*

Agreed by consensus

D. Pending business for the central committee

Based on the assessment of the executive committee, it may not be feasible for the central committee to address a number of pending issues during a meeting using electronic communications, such as the proposed revisions and amendments to the WCC constitution and rules. If the central committee is not able to meet in-person before the assembly, it may be necessary for the current central committee to forward pending business to the new central committee.

Recommendation 11

*The executive committee **asks** the acting general secretary to prepare an inventory of pending central committee business, to be reviewed by the executive committee in May 2021 and brought forward to the central committee for action as needed.*

Agreed by consensus

E. Other business

Recommendation 12

*The executive committee **agrees** to meet 17-20 and 25 (if needed) May 2021 by video conference to finalize the agenda and documentation for the central committee; as well as conduct its ordinary business.*

Agreed by consensus

Recommendation 13

*The executive committee **notes** that the dates for its November meeting will be 12-13 and 15-17 November 2021.*

Agreed by consensus

In response to a question on why the following recommendation was needed now Ms Elaine Dykes, finance director responded saying that the advantage of recording a decision by executive committee now is that if the conditions are met, the transfer to the assembly fund can be recognised in financial statements for 2020. Those statements will normally be approved for issue in April 2021, before executive committee meets again. If the decision is taken now, and can be acted upon, then an allocation of membership contributions to the assembly fund can be included in reporting for 2020.

Recommendation 14

*The executive committee **agrees** that, should general reserves exceed the target of CHF 7 million at 31 December 2020, any value above CHF 7 million be transferred to the assembly fund, reflecting an allocation of membership contributions in 2020 for the assembly.*

Agreed by consensus

Recommendation 15

*The executive committee **approves** the minutes of its meeting 9-13 November 2020 as corrected and amended.*

Agreed by consensus [on Monday]

At the end of the session H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios thanked the committee for its good decision-making on the report.

XI. Closed Session

The executive committee met with the acting general secretary in a closed session. Minutes of the session are kept separately.

XII. Third Plenary Session – Closing Remarks and Prayer

Dr Agnes Abuom shared her closing remarks with the executive committee. On behalf of the leadership of WCC central committee she expressed appreciation for the creative and positive participation during this extraordinary executive committee meeting.

While standing on the shoulders of visionary ecumenical men and women, and even as we continue to build on their foundation and draw wisdom from their foundations, the implementation of the vision and mandate of the unity of the church, may at times be challenging and stressful and filled with uncertainty. This is especially true during the time of COVID-19 with its impact on member church and communities.

She thanked the members of the executive committee for walking the extra mile in this pilgrimage. She said that the members' effective participation and continued commitment to the realization of the mandate of WCC and to the ecumenical movement was awesome.

She specially thanked the acting general secretary and the staff team for providing leadership, guidance and a comprehensive accountability report to the executive committee.

She reiterated the executive committee's gratitude to the working group on constitution and rules, for agreeing to take on an assignment beyond the central committee mandate they were given. Their report and suggestions have been useful and enabled the executive committee to take decisions on the extraordinary agenda of this meeting by electronic communications.

She also thanked the consensus consultant, Mr Lemopoulos as well as the governance staff team, namely Mr Chial and Ms Christ-Taha.

She concluded with St Paul's encouraging words to the early church:

> "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

The extraordinary meeting of the executive committee was officially concluded. She wished the participants a blessed Lenten Season and looked forward to the next ordinary meeting to take place in May 2021.

Rev. Everdith Landrau led the executive committee in a closing prayer.

APPENDIX

Participants

Present
Dr Agnes ABUOM, Anglican Church of Kenya
H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr GENNADIOS OF SASSIMA, Ecumenical Patriarchate
Bishop Mary Ann SWENSON, United Methodist Church
Fr Prof. Dr Ioan SAUCA, World Council of Churches

H.E. Dr Archbishop Abune AREGAWI, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
H.E. Archbishop Dr Vicken AYKAZIAN, Armenian Apostolic Church (Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin)
Rev. Dr Hyunju BAE, Presbyterian Church of Korea
Bishop Petra BOSSE-HUBER, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
Ms Emily Jane EVANS, Uniting Church in Australia
Mrs Anne GLYNN-MACKOUL, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East
Archpriest Mikhail GOUNDIAEV, Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)
Rev. Karl JOHNSON, Jamaica Baptist Union
Rev. Martina Viktorie KOPECKÁ, Czechoslovak Hussite Church
H.E. Metropolitan Serafim KYKOTIS, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa
Rev. Everdith Yaritza LANDRAU, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Rev. Dr Manhong LIN, China Christian Council
H.E. Metropolitan Zachariah Mar NICHOLOVOS, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr NIFON OF TARGOVISTE, Romanian Orthodox Church
Bishop Simo PEURA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
Bishop Rex R. B. REYES, Jr., Episcopal Church in the Philippines
Rev. Karin VAN DEN BROEKE, Protestant Church in the Netherlands
Bishop John F. WHITE, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Apologies:
Rev. Cora Luisa ANTONIO MATAMOROS, Iglesia Morava en Nicaragua
Rev. Dr Festus Ambe ASANA, Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
Rev. Samson Olasupo Adeniyi AYOKUNLE, Nigerian Baptist Convention
Rev. Taaroanui MARAEA, Église protestante Maohi

Staff
Mr Douglas L. CHIAL, Director, Office of the General Secretariat
Ms Catherine CHRIST-TAHA, Coordinator, Governing Bodies and Conference Office
Ms Elaine DYKES, Finance Director
Ms Marianne EJDERSTEN, Communications Director
Mr Marc-Henri HEINIGER, Assembly Logistics Coordinator
Mr Georges LEMOPOULOS, Consensus Consultant
Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso MATEUS, Interim Deputy General Secretary
Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo PHIRI, Deputy General Secretary